

Carroll Avenue – Takoma's "Main Street"

SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

Historic Takoma, Inc.

February 2021

SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR OF TAKOMA PARK: Carroll Avenue

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our exploration of Carroll Avenue, Takoma Park's "Main Street."

Our walk starts at the railroad tracks and continues to Takoma Junction at Ethan Allen. Along the way we stop to share the stories and compare the historical images shown here with the current-day views in front of you.

Carroll Avenue honors the Carroll family, who date back to colonial Maryland. Two brothers bought land here in 1812. Following the Civil War, a grandson Gen. Samuel Sprigg Carroll, lived in the manor house at what is now Takoma Junction. The road originally linked the B&O railroad station to his home. Eventually the road was extended across Sligo Creek to University Avenue, thereby turning it into a true thoroughfare.

The tour along this 3/4 mile streetscape, with its mix of houses and businesses, reflects the development of Takoma Park itself over the decades.

Begin at the Metro green space facing the railroad tracks.

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STOP #1 – Intersection of Cedar Street NW & Railroad Tracks

(looking west, circa 1920 – photo by Morris Bien)



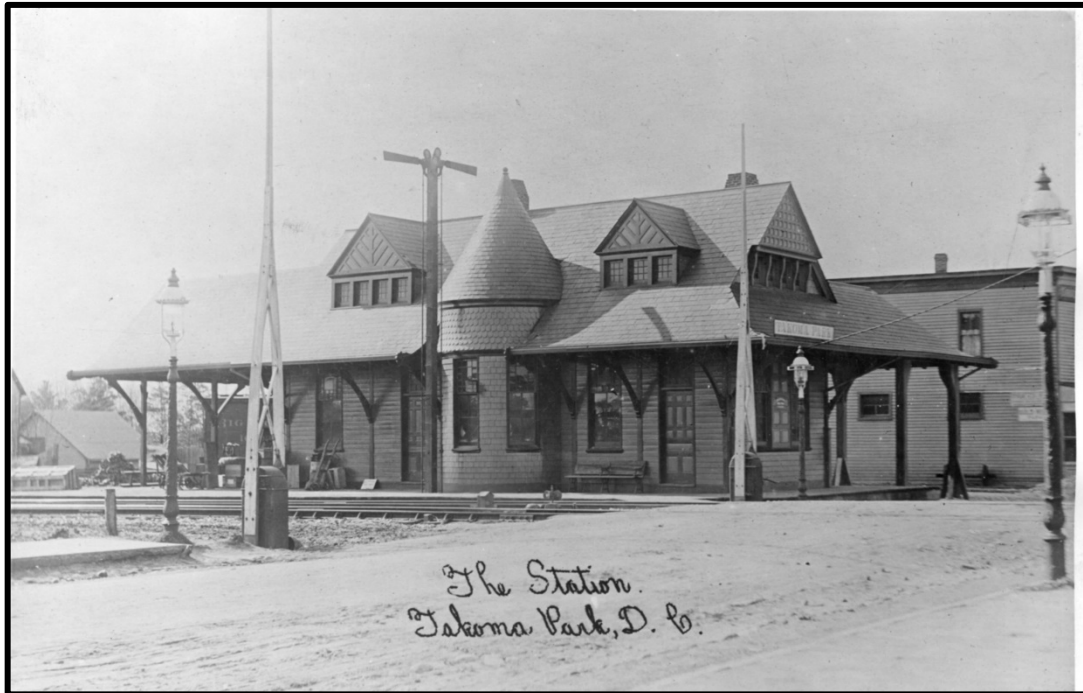
In the years before the arrival of the Metro in 1978, this was the familiar view of the railroad tracks crossing over Cedar Street. The stairs seen on the right have been replaced by the Metro entrance, and escalator to the track level. The beloved train station on the left was lost to arson on August 17, 1967, while discussion was underway to preserve the station by moving out of Metro's proposed path.

Remain in place, looking left of the underpass

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STOP #1-A - SPOTLIGHT: The Lost Train Station

(postcard, circa 1900)



In 1886, this elegant station replaced a tiny passenger shelter. It is one of 15 stations designed by E. Francis Baldwin along the Baltimore & Ohio Metropolitan line. His stations still stand at Rockville and Kensington, offering a sense of what we lost. This station stop was originally "Brightwood" but founder BF Gilbert soon replaced the sign with one for "Takoma Park."

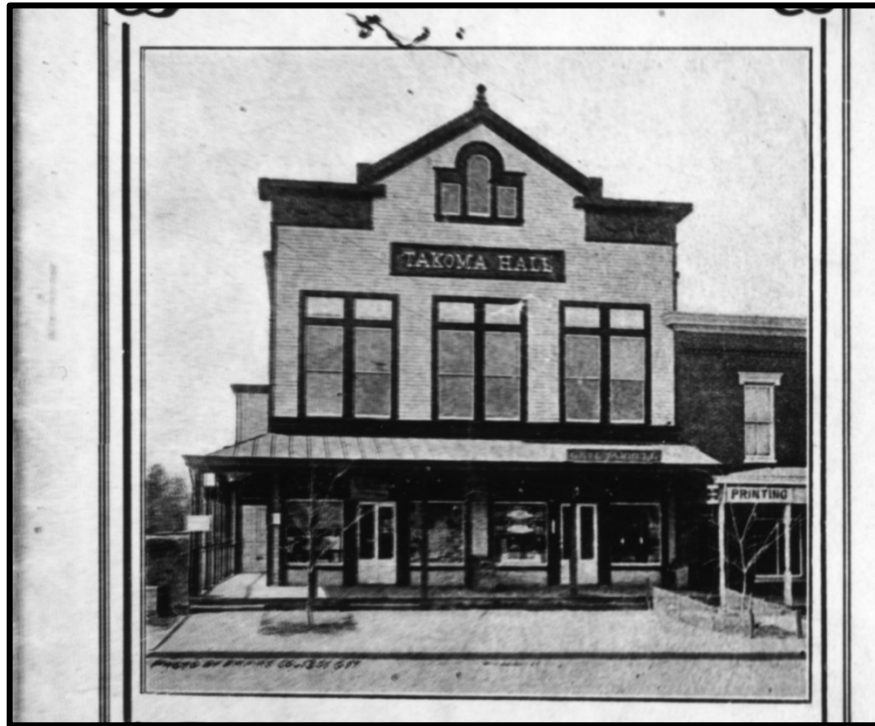
Note that in this photo the station and the railroad tracks are at street level. In 1911 work began to remove tons of dirt from beneath the tracks, creating the underpass we see today.

Remain in place, and look right

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Stop #1-B – Today's Metro Entrance (right side of underpass)

(Photo of Takoma Hall, 1922 – near today's entrance)



Long before there was a Metro, Takoma Hall stood opposite the train station. Rather than backing up to the tracks, the Hall had more room behind it that appears from the photo.

Built in 1895, the Hall served as retail on the first floor while offering community space upstairs. Occupants included the Masons, the Skinner printing press, Takoma's first library, and as a temporary worship site until the Presbyterian and Adventists churches were finished. The building was replaced by a hardware store in 1935, which lasted until the Metro construction.

Turn around and head away from the tracks. Cedar officially becomes Carroll Street once you pass the bus entrance to the Metro on your left. Continue toward the traffic light and stop there.

STOP #2 – Intersection of Carroll and Cedar Streets NW (DC)
TODAY: Hilltop Hostel - 300 Carroll Street NW

(Follmer House, built 1885)



As of 2021 this is home to Hilltop Hostel. When built by W. L. Follmer in 1885, it was the first of three houses on the rise overlooking the train station.

The 1912 underpass greatly altered the Carroll Avenue streetscape. A newly-exposed lower street level created space for the row of storefronts we see today. A steep staircase led from Carroll Avenue to the house's front porch (left side of photo). The development project proposed in 2020 would retain the three houses and storefronts, while adding six-story apartment complex behind the current buildings.

Turn around to face intersection at traffic light.

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STOP #2-A – Corner of Carroll & Cedar Street NW (DC)



This photo shows the intersection of Cedar and Carroll before Metro construction implemented a major realignment. It helps explain the confusion over where Cedar ends and Carroll begins. As you see here, the corner originally was a diagonal split, Cedar bearing left and Carroll bearing right, creating "The Point."

Metro construction eliminated the Y-split by creating a square corner relocating Cedar behind where the store sat. "The Point" became part of the Metro green space, and Cedar Street "disappeared" at the Metro driveway, until it picked up again at the new intersection with Carroll a block further ahead.

As of 2021, we will lose the 7-Eleven that many of us remember on the NE corner of Cedar. A four-story apartment high rise will take over the tiny lot that is not Takoma Central.

Continue along Carroll Street for half a block.

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STOP #3 – Block of 200 Carroll Street NW (DC)
Today: Takoma Central Apartments, 235 Carroll Street NW



Stand facing the entrance to Takoma Central that fills the whole block. Imagine a different world a hundred years ago – or even 15 years ago! Houses and trees lined Carroll Street looking back to the railroad. In fact, you can still see a house peaking over the Torchinsky Funeral Home behind you, much like at Stop #2.

Houses that once filled the block in front of you were long ago demolished to be replaced by a gas station and parking lots (as seen above). The Takoma Central building transformed the block and signaled a surge of redevelopment. It was finally completed in 2014 but only after a decade of design changes and financial setbacks. For years all passers-by saw was a yawning hole in the ground as construction stalled.

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STOP #3A – MAPLE STREET & CARROLL STREET, NW (DC)

(NW Corner - Kniffen House, 1888)



This house sat at the corner of Maple and Carroll, where the Busboys and Poets restaurant is now. Colonel George Kniffen built his house in 1888, where it stood until the 1940s, replaced by a series of parking lots, gas stations, and used car lots before spending years as part of the empty hole awaiting completion of Takoma Central.

Colonel Kniffen played an active role in organizing civic activities in the fledgling suburb. The invitation to his 80th birthday celebration held here in 1911 can be found in our archives.

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**STOP #3B - Boundary Stone NE2, 6980 Maple St. NW (DC)
100 feet from Carroll Street**



This unassuming sandstone boulder in the wrought iron cage is the oldest landmark in Takoma Park. It was laid in place in 1792 by surveyor Andrew Ellicott at the behest of President George Washington. Along with 39 similar boulders, they carved out 10 square miles from Maryland and Virginia to create the federal capital.

B.F. Gilbert bought land on both sides of the border for his first subdivision. This meant some early residents lived in Maryland and some in the District, but they acted as one community. In 1890, residents asked to be incorporated as a town in Maryland. The legislature refused to include the DC side. Takoma Park DC remains a distinct neighborhood today. For many decades the two sides banded together to advance joint interests, a tradition that sometimes surfaces in current time.

NOTE: No signage clearly delineates the dividing line since the two sections of Eastern Avenue (the official border) do not cross Maple. But if you stand at the stone and look diagonally across Maple to the right edge of the fence, that imaginary line is the boundary.

Return to Carroll Street, facing across the street looking at the CVS.

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STOP #4 - South Side of Maple & Carroll NW (DC)
Current: CVS Block, 310 Carroll NW

(Frederick Dudley House, built 1884)



CVS now occupies a block that was residential in Takoma's early days. The home shown here was built by Frederick Dudley, Takoma's predominant builder, for his own family. One of the earliest houses to be occupied, it was finished in time to welcome the arrival of their son, William Wentworth Dudley, on September 29, 1885. William was the first child born in the new suburb.

Dudley oversaw the construction of many of Takoma's early grand houses. The Dudley family would play a prominent role in Takoma civic activities for decades.

Remain on Carroll and cross Maple Street.

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STOP #4A - NE Corner Maple & Carroll NW (DC)

(Takoma Masonic Center, 115 Carroll Street)



The Takoma Masonic Lodge has been at this corner since 1923. The lodge was originally organized in in 1894, sharing space in Takoma Hall (see Stop #1-B) with the Odd Fellows. After a short stint as owners of the Hall, the Masons decided to relocate to this site (adjacent to the MD-DC boundary line). That goal prompted them to sponsor the 1922 Takoma Fair to raise funds for the building project. Currently they share the space with a dozen plus other local Masonic lodges and chapters.

Continue up Carroll.

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STOP #5 –6930 Carroll Avenue (MD)
Today: Takoma Business Center



We are now officially on Carroll Avenue in Maryland, leaving behind Carroll "Street" DC.

Note that the ten-story office building is shifted slightly off axis in relation to Carroll (road at right edge of photo), in order to follow the invisible MD-DC boundary line. It opened in 1972 as the General Conference North Building of the Adventist complex and was used for department offices with a cafeteria on the top floor offering a panoramic view of Takoma. After the General Conference and Publishing House departed Takoma in the 1980s, the building was converted to the general office space we see today.

The 7-Eleven visible in this photo faces the realigned Cedar Street (Stop #2-A), while the open space behind it has yet to become Takoma Central (Stop #3)

Continue up Carroll, OR for the long view, detour right onto Eastern Avenue.

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STOP #6 – Intersection of Carroll & Willow Avenues (MD)

(View of Willow Ave from Adventist building on Eastern, circa 1920)



This nostalgic image captures the intersection of Carroll (left-right) and Willow (moving upward from the sleighs). The open triangle will be taken over in 1958 by the massive Takoma Park Adventist Church of today. It replaced the original church visible at upper right and radically altered commercial center on the Maryland side.

The empty corner where the sleighs are turning will soon feature the Greek Revival-style Takoma Park Bank Building (recently Bank of America, but not for long). And the tower in the far distance at the right of the photo is the City's water tower (see Stop #

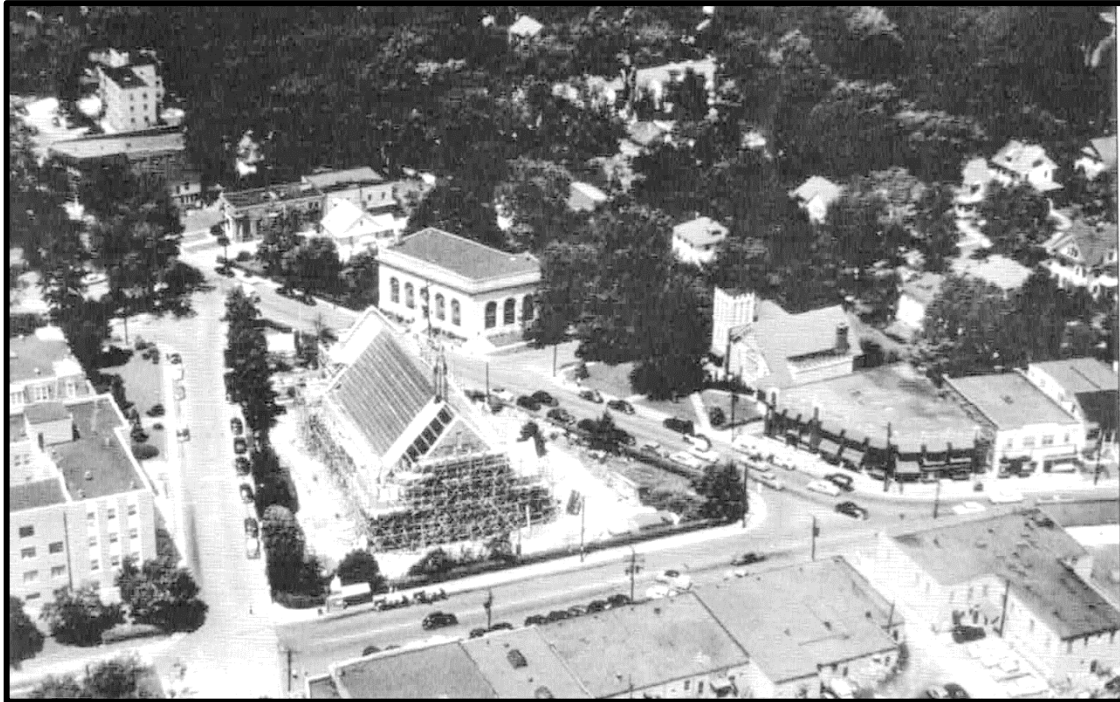
And finally, the shadow on the snow is the Review & Herald Publishing House on Eastern Avenue (barely visible at bottom of photo). It provided a birds-eye view of Takoma Park for the photographers at work there.

Remain in place.

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STOP #7 -- TRIANGLE: Eastern-Carroll-Laurel Intersections

Photo take from Review & Herald, 1952



Thirty years later the Adventist church is under construction, and the streetscape looks more familiar. Once the new church opens, the old church across the street (square spire) will be demolished for parking.

Carroll Avenue runs diagonally across the center, graced by the Takoma Park Bank. Laurel running diagonally along the bottom to intersect with Carroll. Eastern Avenue on the left, closes the triangle. It also marks the division between the District (left) and Maryland (right). The buildings at far left are the afore-mentioned Adventist General Conference and Publishing House. The art deco storefronts along Carroll Avenue's turn where Laurel Ave ends date to the 1930s.

continue to Laurel Avenue

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STOP #8 – 7000 Block of Eastern Avenue
Today: Four-story office building, filling the entire block.

SDA General Conference (left); SDA Review & Herald Publishing (right), circa 1930s



Long before the four-story building consumed this block, the Adventists launched their religious mission in these two Victorian-era houses facing on Eastern. In 1904 they came east from Battle Creek, Michigan, looking for a new home. The General Conference (left) managed the world missions. The Review and Herald Publishing House (right) printed massive amounts of newspapers and books distributed worldwide.

Soon, the first addition appeared (seen here behind the house on the right) and continued wrapping around until they engulfing the entire block. (NOTE: the alley mid-block on Eastern leads to a courtyard where you can see the rooflines of the original structures.)

Over the next seven-plus decades the Adventists would dominated downtown Takoma Park. Finally, in the 1980s they ran out of space and began an exodus up-County. This block was broken up into smaller spaces. Strayer College still occupies the back left corner. The Theological Union renovated the Laurel-Carroll corner (pergola entrance still visible) before giving way to the short-lived International School.

The A-Salon artists collective filled the Publishing House in the 1990s, followed by the Washington Opera and the Takoma Children's School. (Turn left onto Laurel.)

Walk to Carroll and Laurel

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STOP #9 – 6900 Block of Laurel Avenue (MD)

Streetcar terminus on Laurel circa 1920. (Photo from Richard Sanger Collection).



The arrival of the Adventists prompted the creation of a commercial center on the Maryland side of Takoma Park to compete with Fourth Street on the DC side. The terminus for the Baltimore & Washington streetcar service was already in place. We owe our current farmers market plaza to the old streetcar tracks.

Our current-day storefronts along Laurel date back to 1917, a few years after this photo was taken. NOTE: In this era, the Amano store (barely visible at the far stretch of Carroll) was residential.

Walk to Carroll intersection with Laurel Ave.

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STOP #10 – Intersection of Laurel and Carroll Avenues (MD)

Today: Republic, 6939 Laurel Avenue

Gilbert's Log Cabin, 1888-1915 (photo by Arthur Colburn)



It is 1888. You arrive at the train station curious about Gilbert's new suburb. This is what you would see walking up Carroll Avenue. It has long since been replaced by two blocks of storefronts, including Republic.

Why a log cabin? B.F. Gilbert constructed this cabin to be a visible link with Maple and Carroll. Republican Benjamin Harrison was running for president with log cabins as his campaign motif. Gilbert hosted local Republican meetings. He also used it as a welcome center for his real estate customers, briefly adding a five-story makeshift observation tower.

After his death the cabin fell into disrepair, occasionally serving as a jail or storehouse for the fire department pumper. Fire finally destroyed it in 1915. A few years later the two blocks of storefronts created what we now Old Takoma.

Long-term residents fondly remember past years Republic was home to Park Pharmacy and then Video Americain. The Ace Hardware display window once showed of new models of 1930s and 40s automobiles when it was Takoma Motors.

Continue up Carroll, leaving Laurel behind.

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STOP #11 – 7050 Block of Carroll Avenue Between Westmoreland and Columbia Avenues

Colburn House circa 1900 – photo by Arthur Colburn



This splendid mansion on Carroll between Westmoreland and Columbia was home to the Colburn family beginning in 1900. Helen, shown here, and her mother were well known spiritualists in an era where seances and ouija boards were all the rage.

Arthur was a dedicated photographer. Besides taking photos of the “spirits” conjured up by his sister, he captured wonderful images of the people, landmarks and natural settings of his hometown. His treasure trove of photos is now in our Archives. We thank him for providing a window into the early days of Takoma Park.

This house was one of three along this side of Carroll until the 1940s when the area became parking lots and used car lots. In 1970 the Montgomery County Revenue Authority built Takoma Towers as subsidized housing. When ownership passed to Victory Towers LP in 2003, the building became subsidized housing for seniors. The remaining land was acquired in 1974 by Maryland National Capital Park and Planning to create Takoma Urban Park with its Gazebo.

Optional: Detour onto Columbia, down 5 houses

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**STOP #11-A: OPTIONAL – 8 Columbia Avenue: Religious,
Governmental, Residential**
5 houses from Carroll

Adventist Elementary School – (1907-1938)



The brick building you see today began life as a wooden structure. Built in 1907 by the Seventh-day Adventists, it served as their first church and later as an elementary school. Overcrowding in the school led in 1938 to students being transferred to the new John Nevins Andrews Elementary School on Elm Avenue.

The City of Takoma Park arranged to purchase the property to house the police department and health care center. A new brick façade (seen today) was added as part of the renovation. Come 1973, all these departments were consolidated and moved into the new City Hall at Maple and Philadelphia. The building entered its third life as a private residence, and so it remains today.

Return to Carroll and proceed to the Fire Station

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STOP #12: 7100 Block of Carroll Avenue – East Side
TODAY: Residential – Many homes date to 1890s

NOTE: Look down: Tiles installed along edge of sidewalk.



The sidewalk along this residential block between Columbia Avenue and the fire station (ahead) became a canvas for tile artwork. In 2015, Adriana Baler received a city Arts and Humanities grant to design and install this playful tile pattern edging 1000 feet of sidewalk.

Many of the houses on this block were home to officials of the worldwide Adventist church hierarchy, earning the nickname "Bishops Row." The purple house at 7120 Carroll is now occupied by Dr. Amen and family and is home to the Wisdom Path Healing Center.

In the early days of Takoma Carroll Avenue was not as wide as today. But the town grew, and cars made their appearance. Increased traffic demanded the widening of Carroll. It was accomplished by taking property from the front yards on either side to accommodate a new lane.

Continue to the Fire Station.

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STOP #13: Intersection of Carroll & Philadelphia Avenues. 7201 Carroll Avenue – Takoma Fire Station, Design #3

Original fire station, completed 1928



Takoma Park had a volunteer fire department as far back as 1894. But not until this station opened in 1928 did they have a first true fire station, after years of storing equipment in any available space. The firefighters themselves dragged boulders up from Sligo Creek for the façade of the new building. The building quickly became the favored community space for all manner of celebrations and meetings, including City Council meetings. The downstairs gym was open for basketball games and even roller skating.

In 1948, the Fire Department was reorganized under City control and the woefully outdated building was renovated (boulders and all). That lasted until 2010 when, per a deal with Montgomery County, the station was entirely rebuilt to accommodate the much larger modern trucks. The firefighters lobbied to ensure that the Sligo Creek boulders were once again incorporated into the façade.

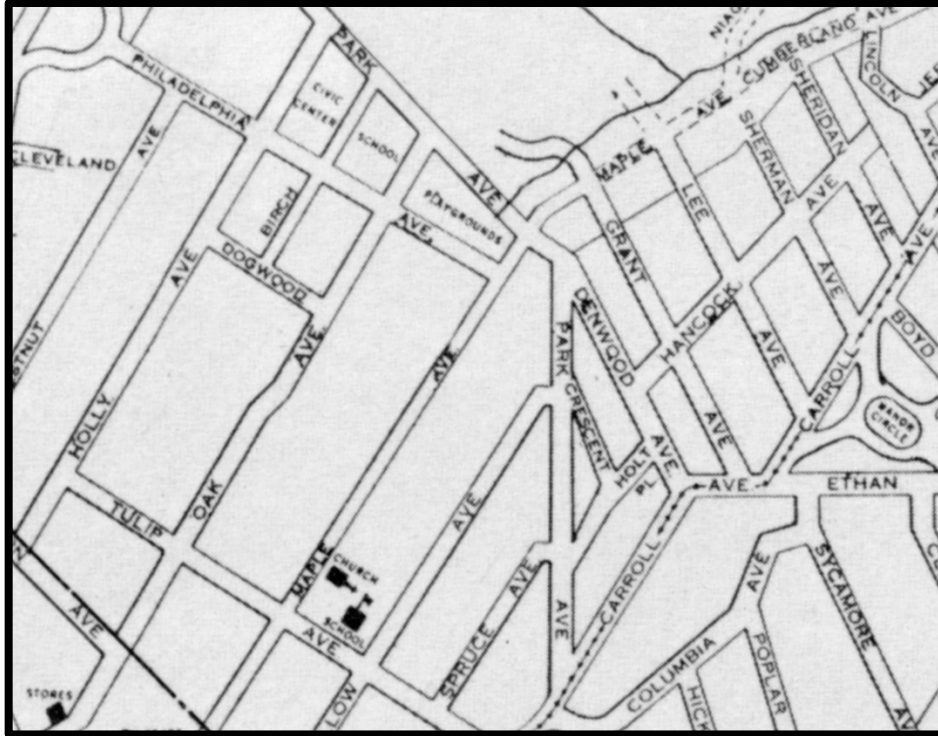
In the early days of the station, a traveling carnival would spend a week on the open space left of the station. Eventually the space was used by Roland Dawes for his hauling and dumping company and later became a parking lot. Roland, one of the most successful entrepreneurs of the Black community, now owns and operates the barber shop across the street at 7214 Carroll Avenue. The debate over how to best use this space has now extended over several decades.

Face Philadelphia Avenue

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STOP #13-A – HOW PHILADELPHIA AVENUE CAME TO BE

Detail from 1922 Map of Takoma Park



Building the Fire Station on Carroll presented one problem. No direct road route existed from the west side of Takoma Park to the station itself, as demonstrated on the 1922 map above. The solution was to re-route the existing section of Philadelphia Avenue (leaving behind "Old Philadelphia") and merging it with the existing Park and Derwood Avenues. Philadelphia Avenue thus became the new east-west route across town.

And before long it was incorporated into the County's East-West Highway, which explains why 410 follows its zigzag path.

Walk one block to traffic light.

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STOP #14 – Intersection of Carroll & Ethan Allen Avenues TODAY: Takoma Junction

Dinky Line trolley circa 1900



Few pictures capture the wilderness of early Takoma Park better than this one. Ethan Allen Avenue headed toward Prince George's County, a road that predated Takoma Park. Carroll Avenue takes a left turn here continuing to Sligo Creek.

The streetcar seen in the photo is the Dinky line trolley on its way to Sligo Creek from Laurel and Carroll in downtown Takoma. This route only operated between 1900 and 1902, helping date this image. It carried passengers to the short-lived Wildwood Resort then operating on Sligo Creek near Heather Ave. Sadly the resort went bankrupt and shortly afterward the trolley was rerouted to Carroll Avenue, linking downtown Takoma to the new Adventist Sanitarium.

The water tower at the center was part of the City water system from 1900-1920. Water filtered from Sligo Creek was pumped here for storage until being distributed to homes across Takoma Park. In 1923, this system was incorporated into the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, and the tower eventually torn down.

The pillar to the left provided entry to Gen. Carroll's manor house, our next stop.

Detour to Manor Circle.

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STOP 14-A – Manor Circle (Gen. Carroll's Manor House)

Today: Manor Apartments, Manor Circle

The Manor House, prior to 1900



All trace of General Carroll's house is gone, but it stood on Manor Circle, likely facing Ethan Allen Avenue. He was a member of the illustrious Carroll family, one of the founding families of Maryland. His grandfather purchased 400 acres of land adjacent to Sligo Creek in 1812 and built Sligo Mill (located roughly where Sligo Creek Parkway meets New Hampshire Avenue). This house sits on part of that land.

General Carroll served on the Union side in the Civil War. His actions on the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg played a key role in the fate of that battle. But his war wounds shortened his military career and he returned to take up residence in what was not yet Takoma Park. He lived to see Gilbert launch his suburb but died not long after.

A portion of the Carroll land holdings were sold to pay the debts in his estate. The streets created from those land sales were named for Grant, Lee, Sherman, Sheridan and Hancock.

The house remained standing after his death. Adventist leader Ellen White rented it for a few years while overseeing the construction of the hospital and the college, but otherwise we know few details. Finally, the dilapidated house was burned down in 1960 as part of a staged fire department training session, thus making way for the apartment building we see today.

Return to Carroll & Ethan Allen.

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STOP #15: Takoma Junction (Carroll & Ethan Allen)
Takoma-Silver Spring Co-op, 201 Ethan Allen



This photo captures the 1998 grand opening of the Takoma Park-Silver Spring Co-op in Takoma Junction. The natural foods grocery operates as a cooperative, with members deciding policy. Neighborhood residents first organized the Co-op in 1981, with a store in Silver Spring before moving to Takoma Park.

The space was originally built as a grocery for Safeway, expanding from their space across the street at Grant & Carroll (now Spring Mill Bakery). The Turner family used it for their electrical appliance business before leasing the building to the Co-op.

The Co-op arrived with a debate already underway about how to best redevelop the block, largely focused on the parking lot. Dozens of solutions have been proposed over the decades with no resolution. The current proposal for retail storefronts has sparked vociferous debate among local residents. Time will tell what happens.

Turn to face Carroll Avenue

STOP 15-B – NE Corner of Carroll & Ethan Allen Avenues
TODAY: B.Y. Morrison Park



In the 1980s this corner was christened as "Takoma Junction," part of City efforts to revitalize this commercial district. The gas station pictured here had been converted into the "Sister City Thrift Shop" in the 1960s to fund a cultural exchange program with Jequie, Brazil.

But the project had lapsed, and corner was renamed B.Y. Morrison Park, in honor of the famed horticulturist who popularized azaleas in hundreds of colors. The building itself was reinvented as a community gazebo, featuring Jim Colwell's "Jazz in the Neighborhood" mural and John Hume's tilework on the columns.

The traffic hassles at this intersection (including Sycamore and Grant Avenues) have plagued City planners and residents for years, complicating efforts to develop the surrounding streetscape.

Continue on Carroll for half block.

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STOP #16 – 7328 CARROLL AVENUE
TODAY: Home to Historic Takoma and Archives



This building became Historic Takoma's home in 2007. Although vacant for several years at that point, it had long been the Barcelona Nut Company. Their nut-processing operation filled three storefronts on the block, along with Jim's Butter Gems and other small mom-and-pop businesses.

These stores trace back to the Dinky line trolley (Stop #14) running between downtown Takoma and the Adventist Sanitarium on Sligo Creek. Situated more or less at the midpoint of the route, passengers took to calling them the "Halfway Stores" and the name stuck.

The huge display window of Historic Takoma's home recalls its original tenant in 1932--a Piggly Wiggly grocery store. This chain was the first to allow customers to walk up and down aisles and choose their own produce and canned goods.

At one point there were three grocers on this block. Over the decades, the shopkeepers may have changed, but the range of services from deli and bakery to dry cleaners and picture-framers plus new choices in between remains constant.

++END OF TOUR++

FINAL MESSAGE

For those who wish to explore further on foot, four more blocks of Carroll bring you to Sligo Creek.

If you want to connect to the walking-biking path of Sligo Creek Parkway, you have to bear right downhill at Old Carroll Avenue (opposite Jefferson Avenue). This follows the original route over the creek, a pedestrian-only bridge.

Otherwise, remaining on main Carroll will take you across the newly reconstructed bridge to the Adventist campus. The hospital closed in 2020, moving to new quarters in White Oak, but Washington Adventist University remains.

If you are curious about any of the places and people described on the tour, please visit us at historictakoma.org and explore our online narratives and resources.